

HARBOURING HERITAGE – A HISTORY OF FORTROSE HARBOUR PART 4



CARGO & SHIPS FROM SAIL TO STEAM

CARGO

The 1813 Memorial petitioning to have the harbour established (see Part 1) emphasised the need to open-up trade via a harbour. A report from 1828 in Part 2 lists the annual imports and exports in the early days of the harbour and an interesting insight in to just how much cargo was passing through the harbour 60 years later before the advent of the railway can be gained by examining the various statements made to the **Select Committee on Railway Bills in April 1890**¹.

John Henderson (appearing as the Fortrose Town Clerk and also the factor for the Rosehaugh Estate, the managing partner of the firm Alexander Henderson, coal, lime & agricultural contractors, a general merchant in both Fortrose & Avoch, a ship owner and the general manager & secretary of the Black Isle Shipping Company), was able to state that **the total quantity of goods shipped and unshipped at Fortrose by sailing vessels during 1889 had been 7,354 tons; additionally the ferry steamer the *Rosehaugh* had dealt with 1,710 tons.**

A nature of the types of cargo can be appreciated from the same statements. In 1889, 15,000 pairs of hares and rabbits had been **exported** from Fortrose mainly to Sheffield. Similarly, 1,000 pheasants and 2,000 brace of partridges had been sent to Inverness by steamer. Potatoes had been shipped to Newcastle, Sunderland, Portsmouth & London. The export of potatoes is a marked change from the 1828 report.

Lime & coal seemed still to have been the **major imports**. Lime either came from England by rail before being transhipped to Fortrose or came from Keith via either Lossiemouth or Burghead before being shipped to Fortrose. **John Smith**, who had been a merchant in Fortrose for 33 years, obtained his goods via the **Thornbush** pier (on the River Ness) where they were shipped on the Black Isle Steam Shipping Company steamer. His goods arrived at Thornbush by a number of routes including the steamer *Earnholm* sailing from Leith via Aberdeen or from Liverpool and Glasgow via the Caledonian Canal.

¹ The Black Isle Railway by Jack Kernahan ISBN: 978 0 9545485 99
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Evidence was also given that much of the **building stone** came in through the harbour from the Mulbine quarry between Covesea and Hopeman (this despite there being good stone available on the Black Isle – the choice being influenced by ease of transport and costs rather than quality).

It was clear from their evidence that the **merchants were keen to see a railway** take the place of much of the seaborne cargo on the grounds of reducing costs and damage caused by transshipping and the potential for rough passages.

While the advent of the railway meant that the regular steamer service may have been short lived and the volume of goods passing through the harbour was reduced general cargo ships used the harbour for many more years and bulk cargoes such as coal in and pit props out remained economic by sea.

THE SAILING SHIPS

A famous Fortrose ship was the schooner the **Annie of Inverness** owned by **John Henderson** and skippered by Captain Donald Paterson who lived in Academy Street. A typical load for her would consist of props for the wood merchant, barley and potatoes. *Annie of Inverness* was built in 1883 by Geddie shipyards on Speyside (Kingston & Garmouth) as a schooner of 116 tons measuring 84' x 21' 6" x 10' 3".



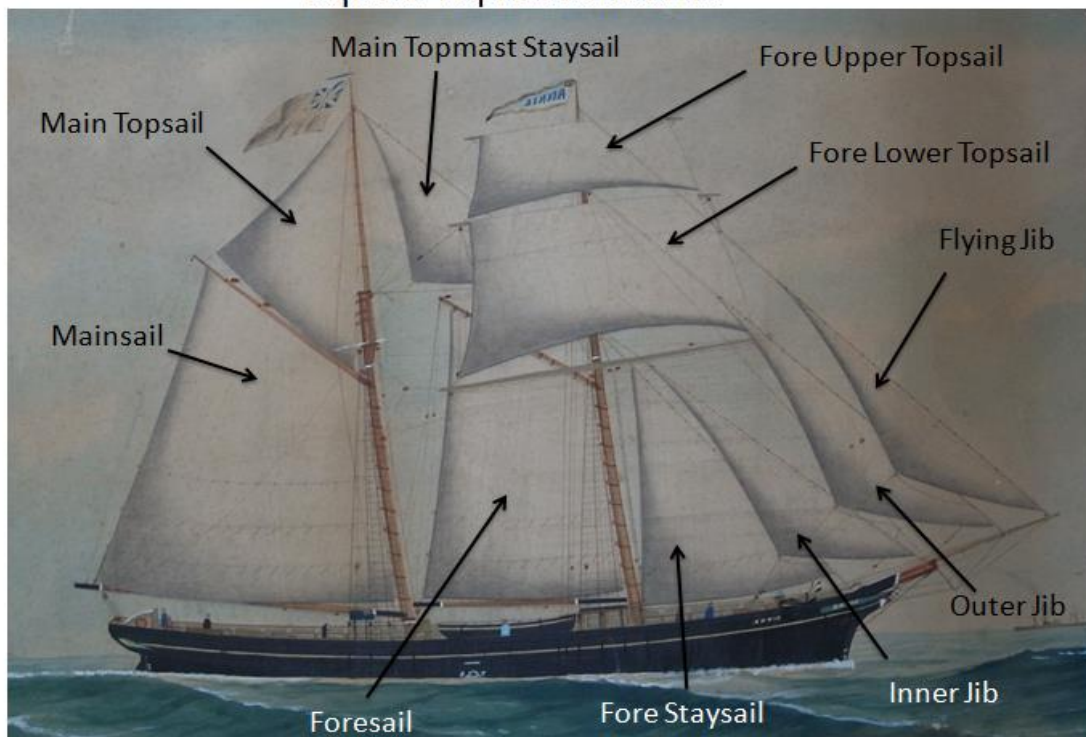
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The above water colour of the *Annie* showing her rigging in great detail was given to George Taylor by George MacFarlane (see the story of the *Young Fox* below).

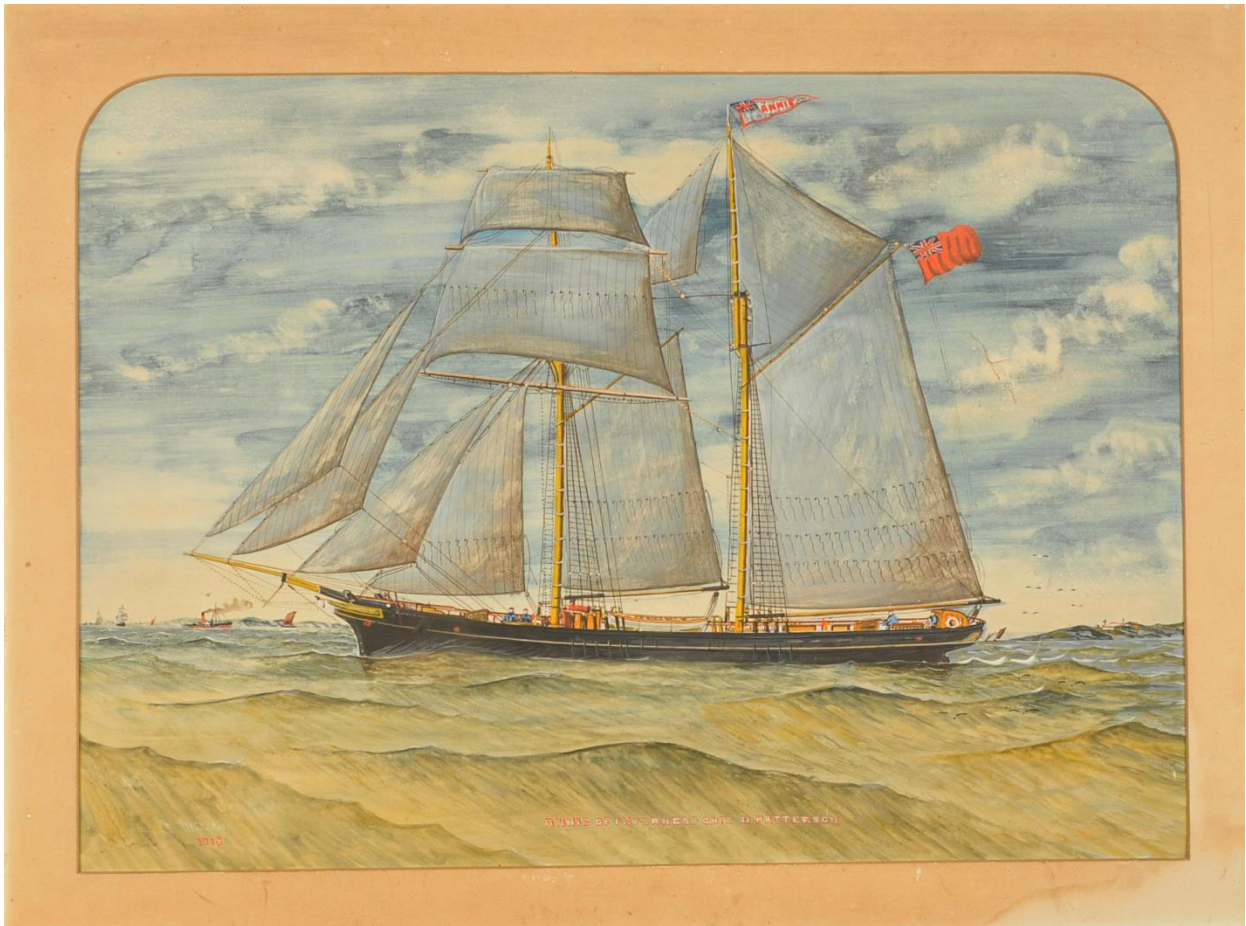


Detail of the *Annie* showing the steersman and possibly Captain Paterson.

Square Topsail Schooner



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This is the Groam House Museum painting of the *Annie* by J Middleton dated 1913. J Middleton is believed to have been a local Policeman². The master's name is given as Patterson with 2 't's.

The *Annie* was **wrecked** at Swona, Orkney, on June 7th, 1925. All crew were saved.

Groam House Museum owns another fine painting by J Middleton this time dated 1911 and is of the *Maggie*. She was another Geddie ship launched in 1875 as a schooner of 100 tons measuring 90'2" x 21'3" x 10'5". She is painted carrying 3 square sails on the foremast which sets her apart from the other

² This information from Chris Hood: 'as to J. Middleton, I was in correspondence twenty odd years ago with Alistair Melville from Strichen, who told me that J. Middleton (I don't know what the 'J' stood for) had been a policeman (he wasn't sure where), and that he (Alistair Melville) had traced eleven ship paintings by Middleton in N E Scotland dating from 1893 to 1912. He also told me that Middleton's painting of the ketch Annie of Fortrose was in Findhorn at that time. Melville told me he had seen two ship paintings by Middleton at an exhibition in Peterhead and one in Aberdeen Art Gallery, and knew of two more in the Fishertown Museum in Nairn, all painted between 1907 and 1912. He himself had an 1893 Middleton painting of the (early) steamer Strathbeg (built at Kinghorn in 1877), which had been in his family since it was originally painted.'

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Geddie ships in the area. The *Maggie* was a Nairn vessel engaged in coastal trade and therefore is very likely to have visited Fortrose Harbour. She is believed to have belonged at one time to Hugh McIntosh, wood merchant then John Gordon (wood merchant, company still operating in Nairn) with cargoes of timber pit props to Sunderland; coal & fertilizer on return³ In the early 1900s she belonged to John Findlay as detailed in his obituary in a Nairn newspaper:

6th Feb 1917 - Obituaries

DEATH OF A NOTED SKIPPER - Captain John Findlay, Nairn, passed away after a brief illness of Friday 26th inst.

Deceased was a native of Burghead, but came to Nairn when quite a young man, and served in various capacities on board local schooners. He was one of a few captains on sailing vessels who held a master mariner's certificate, and was a skilful navigator.

He commanded the local schooner "Glide" in which vessel he visited many Mediterranean ports, along with the Dardanelles and Constantinople, and also took part in the American and Newfoundland fish trades. Later on he bought the schooner "Maggie" in which he sailed up until seven or eight years ago. In the latter vessel he made several trips to the Baltic and French ports but was principally involved in the coastal trade.

He commanded an Admiralty trawler in the boom defence at Scapa Flow, but retired a few years ago owing to ill-health. For a time a member of the Nairn Town Council, he gave valuable advice on the question of the Harbour and other subjects with which he was familiar. He was held in much respect by all who knew him.⁴

³ Information from Robert Gordon, Nairn Sailing Club

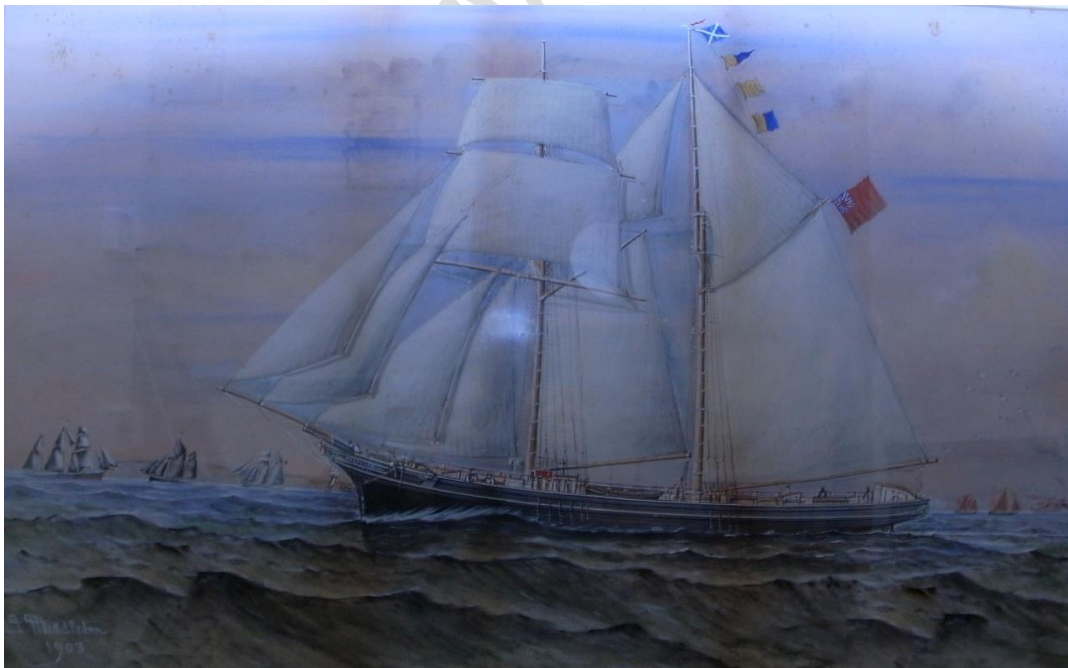
⁴ From Margaret Krize. Great-Granddaughter of John Findlay

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The *Maggie*

Another local vessel was the ***Dispatch*** owned from 1892 to 1919 by Donald McLeman, merchant from Avoch. Her story is a long one and her bones still survive.



The *Dispatch* from a water colour by J Middleton dated 1903. The fore lower topsail in this painting does not look 'right' for the *Dispatch* (see details

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below) so was perhaps painted from a stock illustration. Her name is spelt 'Despatch'. Compare this photo of her in the early 1930s⁵:



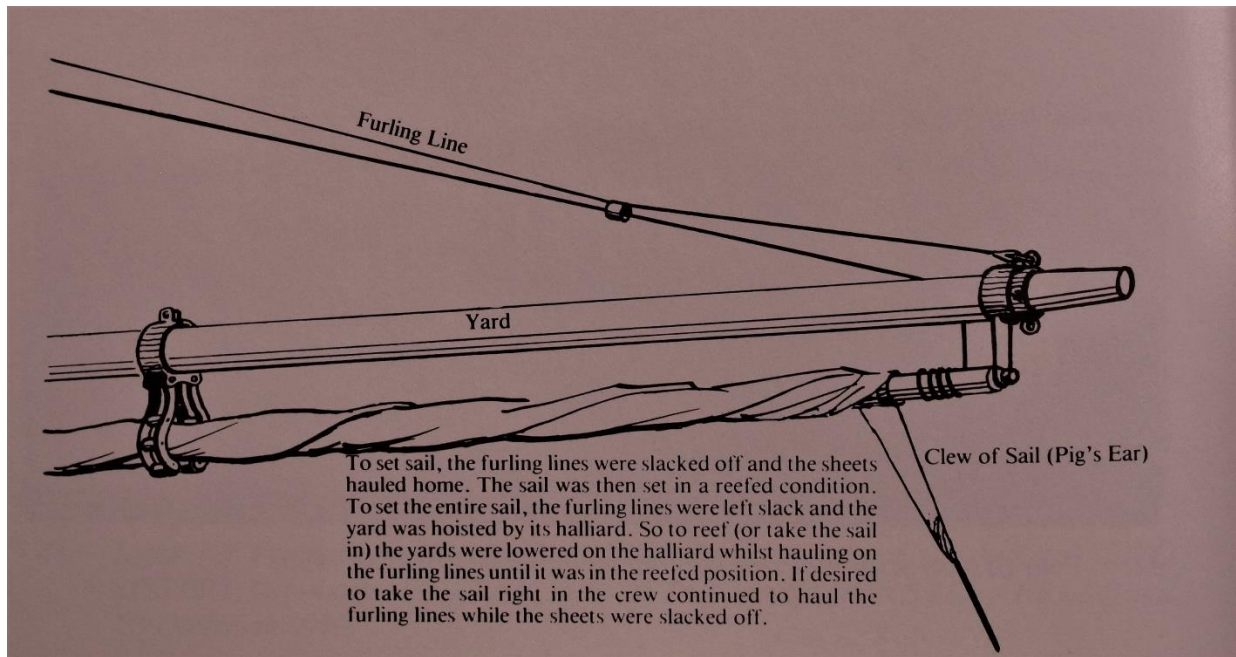
The *Dispatch* (official number 95741, code MGQK – note in the Middleton painting she is displaying M, 5?, G & K from the mainsail luff)) was **built in 1888** by Geddie's as a 2 masted wooden topsail schooner of 120 gross tons. She was the penultimate ship that Geddie's built as steam was taking over from sail and iron and steel from wood (helped by the Bessemer process). She was 90.1 feet long with a 21.5 foot beam and drew 10.3 feet⁶. She was rigged by Alex Irving of Carney Sail & Ropework. She was very sturdy being cross-braced and featured Jonathon Fells patented movable iron knees (adjustable knees to maintain the tension between the hull and decks). She also exhibited an extremely rare example of a British registered topsail schooner utilising the **French Roller Reefing design** 'hunier à rouleau' which enabled her to set her topsails from the deck removing the need to go aloft (by the 1880s it was becoming ever harder to find seamen wanting to serve on tall ships when they could earn similar wages on steamers). This feature which involved a very **long cross spar or yard** on the foremast helps identify her in photos and separate her from

⁵ Courtesy of Chris Hood great-great grandson of Alex Irving who rigged many of Geddie's ships

⁶ Lloyd's Register of Shipping via plimsollshipdata.org

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her near relative the *Annie*. There is some evidence that she was re-rigged at a later date.



'hunier à rouleau' (roller topsail), popular with Breton boats but very rare with British boats – possibly only fitted to 3 including *Dispatch*.

It is believed that *Dispatch* made her **maiden voyage to Morocco**, probably with salted fish from Newfoundland, and spent the first period of her working life running across the Atlantic with salt fish from the Grand Banks in Newfoundland. McLeman was her 3rd owner (buying her when she was still young) and had her converted to a **collier**.



The *Dispatch* in Fortrose Harbour with the crew 'bending on' sails. Just visible to the left is the bowsprit of another vessel – possibly the *Annie*. The

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long spar below the fore lower topsail is clearly visible and from the spacing between the spars you can see that the fore-lower was a comparatively shallow sail (ie short in the leeches).

1919 saw the *Dispatch* leave Scotland and pass into the hands of Welsh owner WA Jenkins who retained her original Inverness registry while employing her to transport Swansea coal. The 1930s saw her shrug off two major collisions and live through a hurricane in open sea without supplies for some five weeks. In 1935 she was de-rigged and converted in to a **towed barge** (the Lloyd's Register for 1935 is stamped 'now a lighter') known as the *New Dispatch*. Incredibly she continued in service until 1958 – some 70 years after she was built - before being finally **beached in 1961** at Purton on the Severn Foreshore (with other hulks to stabilise the shore line) where her bones remain.

She was singled out for a mention by Jeremy Paxman in episode 2 of his 2017 TV series, 'Rivers with Jeremy Paxman' (Channel 4, first broadcast 5 March 2017).



Jeremy Paxman with the *Dispatch* behind him with the iron 'knees' visible

The **Young Fox** was another vessel which visited Fortrose and the McLeman family had an interest in her too (she was an Avoch ketch⁷ under Captain MacIntosh). She was still working as a sailing boat in the 1920s. On a voyage to Northumberland for coal George MacFarlane who lived on the Shore (cottage now called Fuchsia) was co-opted as crew. George MacFarlane features too in parts 5 & 6 of the harbour story. He was a

⁷ From 'Down to the Sea, an account of life in the fishing villages of Hilton, Balintore & Shandwick' by Jesse Madonald and Anne Gordon.

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qualified marine engineer who at a later point became the Harbour Master and the janitor for Fortrose Academy. George was not needed on the last part of the *Young Fox's* return voyage and found his own way home from Burghead by train – fortunately for him as the *Young Fox* was lost with all hands on 6 December 1928 – her wreck is believed to have been found off Tarbat Ness in 43 metres of water in 2008.

TRADE DISPUTE

There was a major dispute about harbour dues in 1879 that ended-up in the Scottish Court of Session⁸ (the supreme civil court) in May 1881. Kenneth Mackenzie residing in Rosemarkie used to run a **small steamer** called the *Speedwell* which **traded between Fortrose and Inverness**. He had a rival in the Moray Firth Shipping Company whose boat agent, Duncan Macpherson, ran a steamer called the *Eilean Dubh*⁹. Macpherson was also the 'tacksman' (rent collector in this context) for Fortrose harbour acting on behalf of the magistrates (the burgh council).

In September 1879 Duncan Macpherson, tacksman under the Magistrates of Fortrose of the burgh, shore, and harbour dues, brought this action against Kenneth Mackenzie, owner of the steamer "Speedwell" plying between Inverness and Fortrose, concluding for a sum of £30 as harbour and shore dues incurred by him for the use of the harbour, shore, and anchorage grounds of the burgh of Fortrose in landing live stock and goods.

A second action was raised by the pursuer in October 1879, concluding for an additional sum of £29, 1s. 9d., being the amount of further dues, part of which were incurred before the former action was raised, but payment of which the pursuer stated he then believed was not to be refused. The two processes were conjoined. In addition to the pleadings above narrated, it was pleaded in both actions—" (3) The defender is entitled to absolvitor in respect 1st, any dues which have been claimed have been always charged against senders and consignees of goods and not against owners of vessels; 2d, said rates were never posted up or brought to the defender's knowledge."

Mackenzie tried a number of defences. The first was to dispute the right of the magistrates to claim harbour dues. The case considers a long submission by the 'Lord Ordinary' covering the history of the harbour. In this he states that the authority to charge dues came from an act of Parliament in 1823. He was critical of the manner with which the magistrates and council set dues, not conforming to the instructions of the Commissioners of Roads and Bridges. The Lord Ordinary believed the magistrates' claim to be illegal. The case went to appeal. Mackenzie also stated that if magistrates did have the right to levy dues, some of the cargoes he had landed were beyond the boundary of their jurisdiction (presumably the beach) and they had lost their rights for the harbour as they had let the pier fall into disrepair. Finally, he pleaded that such dues

⁸ <https://www.casemine.com/judgement/uk/5a8ff81a60d03e7f57eba1d2#>

⁹ Information from Elizabeth Sutherland

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should be levied from the senders and consignees of goods, not the shipowner.

The Lord Justice Clerk (second most senior judge in Scotland) in a very long judgement concluded 'On the whole matter, I have come without any difficulty to the conclusion that the magistrates are entitled to continue the exercise of the right which they have now apparently exercised for so long a period'. The other lords (Lord Young & Lord Craighill agreed with the Lord Justice Clerk). Lord Craighill saying 'it is a mere bagatelle of a criticism upon a few pounds'. Mackenzie lost the case.

OTHER VESSELS

While **not really a 'fishing harbour'** although there is plenty of photographic evidence of small open fishing boats beached East and West of the harbour and of posts on the mole (East wall) used to dry nets, the harbour was occasionally used by larger fishing boats as shown in this photo of around 1919.



The 3 fishing boats 'rafted' together appear to be 'Zulus'. The wooden posts holding them off the Eastern mole have gone today but it is possible to see where the sockets were in the wall for the braces. On the mole 3 posts for drying nets are quite clear.

This is another view showing the bracing of the piles clearly and the drying posts; it is believed to date from around 1935. Of note the bracing posts are nearer the top of the mole than in the earlier picture and the piles appear to be closer to the wall.

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The photo below, taken shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, shows the **Jesmond** (left) and **Fernside** unloading.



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This is the same scene from a different angle:



The Scaffie's tin shed is in the middle ground.

The *SS Fernside* (official number 144834, code KJFQ) was built in 1921 by R B Harrison of Newcastle for T Rose. She was 117.1 feet long, 22.2 feet in the beam and drew 9.1 feet and was 269 gross registered tons (grt)¹⁰ and was owned by the Rose Line Ltd of Sunderland. She had a compound 2-cylinder steam engine built by the Shields Engine Company Limited and was rated at 57 RHP ('Register' horse power). Her last voyage was from Hartlepool for Wick with a cargo of coal on 26 February 1942. The ship was never seen afloat again. A Joint Arbitration Committee considered the **vessel lost on 27 February 1942 by 'War Risks'**; she was possibly bombed by German aircraft. All 8 crew and her 2 DEMS (Defensively Equipped Merchant Ships) gunners were lost.¹¹ She was found by sports divers in 2007 four miles off Stonehaven. Her bell has been recovered by the Deeside Divers who reported that this armed collier lies on her port side in 58 metres of water and is fairly intact till you reach the bridge area where she is a little more broken up.¹² A subsequent dive found her hold still to be full of coal.¹³

¹⁰ Lloyd's Register of Shipping via plimsollshipdata.org

¹¹ From a post by Bill McGee Mercantile Marine (mercantilemarine.org)

¹² From the Deeside Sub Aqua Club

¹³ Post by Rod Macdonald

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The *SS Jesmond* (official number 122823, code HDBN) was both older and smaller than the *SS Fernside*¹⁴. She was built in 1905 by Smith's Dock Company Limited of North Shields and was 112.7 feet long with a beam of 20.2 feet and a draught of 9.1 feet with a grt of 192. Her engine was from the same company as *SS Fernside* but with a power output of 55 RHP. In 1939 her owner was listed as I Milne and her home port as Newcastle. Unlike the *SS Fernside*, the ***Jesmond* survived the Second World War** and is still listed as working in 1945 (by then owned by the Tay Sand Company Limited with a home port of Dundee).

George Taylor recalled that the last vessel to visit the harbour before the outbreak of World War 2 was a **Dutch motor barge** operated by a live-on-board family that collected a cargo of seed potatoes. Interestingly, 'Down to the Sea, an account of life in the fishing villages of Hilton, Balintore & Shandwick' by Jesse Madonald and Anne Gordon, also records that the last vessel to visit the harbour of Balintore before war broke out was a flat-bottomed Dutch boat.

After World War 2 there seems to have been little cargo activity although the Club minutes of 1 May 1979 have this little snippet showing that colliers still featured occasionally.

that he should speak to Henry Scrimshaw who may be able to help.
(2) The Coal boat had not come in at Fortrose Harbour as had been intended but had unloaded at Inverness instead.

¹⁴ Lloyd's Register of Shipping via plimsollshipdata.org
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